3.3 VISUAL RESOURCES

The natural beauty of the islands of Hawai'i includes not just lush tropical forests, waterfalls, and sandy beaches framed by turquoise waters, but active and dormant volcanoes and towering mountains. The analysis of visual resources includes examining the impacts on visual resources from the installations and at a distance from the installations. They also include places of cultural importance, such as Mount Ka'ala and Mauna Kea. Places of cultural importance are addressed in Section 3.11, Cultural Resources.

3.3.1 Introduction/Region of Influence

Visual resources are usually defined as the visual quality or character of an area, consisting of both the landscape features and the social environment from which they are viewed. The landscape features that define an area of high visual quality may be natural (e.g., mountain views) or manmade (e.g., city skyline). In order to assess the quality of visual resources in the action area, this section describes the overall visual character and distinct visual features on or in the viewshed of each installation or training area, as well as any sensitive viewpoints within these viewsheds. The area of analysis for visual resources covers the installations and observation points up to 1.5 miles from the installations. In general, features beyond a mile are so distant that only forms and outlines are discernable, and visual impacts are negligible.

The installations and training ranges evaluated in this EIS are within the counties of Honolulu and Hawai'i. Although the counties do not have jurisdiction over the use of federal lands, the Army considers the guidance contained in the general plans in its decisions, to the greatest extent practicable, in order to avoid or minimize conflicts with surrounding nonfederal lands. The county general plans provide policies and objectives with respect to scenic resources. Additional regulations pertaining to visual resources are provided in Appendix N.

General Plan for the City and County of Honolulu

The General Plan for the City and County of Honolulu is a statement of the long-range social, economic, environmental, and design objectives for O'ahu, as well as a statement of broad policies that facilitate attainment of the plan objectives (City and County of Honolulu 1992). Section III of the plan contains the objectives of the City and County of Honolulu with respect to scenic resources, including the following:

> Objective B - To preserve and enhance the natural monuments and scenic views of O'ahu for the benefit of both residents and visitors.
>
> > Policy 2: Protect O'ahu's scenic views, especially those seen from highly developed and heavily traveled areas.

O'ahu is divided into eight planning areas, each of which has a development plan that implements the objectives and policies of the general plan and guides the long-range land use and infrastructure planning for the area. SBCT installations and training areas are within the Central O'ahu, Wai'anae, North Shore, Ko'olau Loa, and Urban Center planning areas. Scenic resources or scenic resource management policies identified in each community plan area are described in the affected environment for each installation or training range.

General Plan for the County of Hawai'i

The General Plan for the County of Hawai'i is a statement of development objectives, standards, and principles with respect to the most desirable use of land within the county (County of Hawai'i 1989).

The long-range goals with respect to the natural beauty of the island of Hawai'i include the following:

- Protect, preserve and enhance the quality of areas endowed with natural beauty, including the quality of coastal scenic resources;
- Protect scenic vistas and view planes from becoming obstructed; and
- Maximize opportunities for present and future generations to appreciate and enjoy natural and scenic beauty.

3.3.2 Resource Overview

The visual character of an area is defined in terms of four primary components, including water, landform, vegetation, and cultural modifications. These components are characterized or perceived in terms of the design elements form, line, color, texture, and scale. Visual components also may be described as being distinct (unique or special), average (common or not unique), or minimal (a liability) elements of the visual field and in terms of the degree to which they are visible to surrounding viewers (e.g., foreground, middle ground, and background).

The visual quality of an area is defined in terms of the visual character and the degree to which these features combine to create a landscape that has the following qualities: vividness (memorable quality), intactness (visual integrity of environment), and unity (compositional quality). An area of high visual quality usually possesses all three of these characteristics.

Visual quality of an area also is defined in terms of the visual sensitivity within the viewshed of the proposed action. Locations of visual sensitivity are defined in general terms as areas where high concentrations of people may be present or areas that are readily accessible to large numbers of people. They are further defined in terms of several site-specific factors, including the following:

- Areas of high scenic quality (i.e., designated scenic corridors or locations);
- Recreation areas characterized by high numbers of users with sensitivity to visual quality (i.e., parks, preserves, and private recreation areas); and
- Important historic or archaeological locations.

The visual landscape on SBMR is largely characterized by developed features in the valley, with the rugged Wai'anae and Ko'olau Mountains dominating the background. The visual landscape of DMR is also largely characterized by developed features, including the airfield and associated structures, fencing, antenna support structures, and roads.

Portions of Dillingham Trail are characterized by a broad, rolling valley floor, with pineapple plantations that give the landscape a fine uniform texture. As the proposed Dillingham Trail approaches Thomson Corner and Waialua, urban development begins to dominate the visual field, but agricultural uses continue. Between Thomson Corner and Waialua, the trail would cross Farrington Highway toward the Waiʻanae Mountains and enter into a broad alluvial plain at the base of the mountains. This area is predominantly in agricultural use. As the route continues west, the Pacific Ocean becomes an increasingly dominant middleground to foreground feature in views to the north.

The visual landscape of KTA generally is characterized by panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean and the Koʻolau Mountains or coastal plain and pali. Human-made features on KTA are limited to roads, antenna support structures and windmills, and a few structures dispersed throughout the area. Drum Road is in an area generally characterized by the irregular form of the Koʻolau Mountains ridges and valleys, with few human-made features.

The landscape of PTA is characterized by panoramic views of the broad open area between Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa. There are few human features in the area, except roads and support facilities within the training area and structures, roads, and an airfield within the cantonment area of PTA. Terrain in the PTA area is gently sloping and open, periodically interrupted by remnant volcanic cones (puʻu). Lava flows create dark visually receding areas throughout PTA.

The area through which PTA Trail passes is largely undeveloped, except for the village of Waikoloa. From most viewing locations along major roadways or other population centers, the trail would be a middle or background feature and would be obstructed by topography and vegetation. The proposed route would be most visible where it would parallel the Kawaihae Road and where it would cross the Hawaiʻi Belt Road. Terrain along PTA Trail is generally gently sloping, with intermittent puʻu. Lava flows that create dark, visually receding areas occur throughout the proposed trail alignment.